BLACKBOX

The Man Who Sold The World

Carlo Passoni

Every BlackBox is a written reality, ready to emerge from your reading. Your neurons, your synapses, become the trigger that brings it to life in a very particular space-time: your mind. This does not mean it is not real, on the contrary: precisely because it exists inside your mind, it is more real than anything else.

Copyright © 2026 Carlo Passoni

All rights reserved.

From the original Italian manuscript, translated

Simulation n°312
loading...

NAEMON

"Dear citizens of Earth,
this is Elija Silbermann speaking, President of the Global Confederation.
With the advent of Artificial General Intelligence, our world has undergone transformations no one could've ever imagined. We've had to reinvent ourselves, adapt, and find new ways to preserve the element that keeps us united as a species: the economy.
I know how difficult it's been. Some have seen this system as a push toward new possibilities, others have experienced it as a form of modern slavery. But it's thanks to this balance that we've managed to make Universal Basic Income a reality, without losing the very meaning of progress.
Because remember: it's difficulties, inefficiencies, desires, the hunger for something more that drive us to evolve. And although we could satisfy ourselves, we mustn't. We have to remain hungry.
And that's precisely why today I'm announcing a historic development. But first, a brief recap of the system that accompanies us every day, so we can better understand what's to come.

Every month, each of you receives a quantity of

WorldCoin in your certified WorldID account. These are no longer spent in the old traditional way, by directly exchanging them for goods or services.
Now you use them to purchase stocks: instruments that connect you directly to the value of the goods and services you want to access.
There are three fundamental types:

1. **Consumption Stocks (CS)** – the only ones with a subjective expiration, managed by the company. They're the passport to access the goods and services you desire: food, energy, housing, transportation, social media… every product or service today is tied to its own dedicated stocks.

2. **Ordinary Stocks** – they grant dividends in WorldCoin, bonuses, and the possibility of trading. If a company's performance grows, you can sell them, reinvest them, or convert them into Consumption Stocks.

3. **Sovereign Stocks** – the top tier. They add to the benefits of ordinary ones decision-making power and ownership rights. The more you own, the greater your influence over

corporate decisions.

We've come to understand that taxation, fiscal systems, contributions, and all the rest were obsolete and inefficient. What drives civilization isn't bureaucracy, but investment.

That's why we've listed everything:

- Cities, to live in them and make use of their shared services.

- States, to be part of a community with rights and duties, including participation in voting.

- The WorldID, which safeguards your human rights and guarantees access to the benefits of the Global Confederation, first and foremost the UBI.

But one piece was still missing, an energy our Equitism system had yet to express.
Something that could push us further.
The answer was right in front of us: people.

We must - list - people - as - well.
We must invest in individuals.

And it is with pride that today I announce: from this moment on, every single citizen of the Global Confederation will be officially listed.

Each of you becomes an issuer of three classes of stocks:

1. **Consumption Stocks** – your time, your skills, your services. The lifeblood of everyday work. They have a subjective expiration and, if you wish, they can be put up for auction to intercept the highest bidder before the sale, ensuring that the value of your services is recognized and placed at the right market price.

2. **Ordinary Stocks** – which distribute dividends proportional to your annual income.

3. **Sovereign Stocks** – which combine dividends

and decision-making power. Investors, based on their shares, will be able to direct educational paths, careers, and strategic decisions, enhancing talent and maximizing productivity.

Naturally, anyone who violates the rules will be stripped of their WorldID.
The full regulation will be published tomorrow on the official portals of the Global Confederation and the World Exchange Authority.
May your life be a prosperous investment. I wish you the best possible price."

This was the announcement that definitively marked the transition from capitalism to equitism.

In the years that followed, society, now anesthetized by entertainment and the comforts guaranteed by the new system, stopped resisting. Powerless, drained of will, the population gave up every form of protest, embracing Equitism as an inevitable fate.

After the first twenty years, the new world order took shape. New centers of power emerged, with new dynamics of influence. The balance shifted completely, and a new elite imposed itself.

Thus were born the Stock Hunters, nicknamed Stunthers: ruthless businessmen tasked with tracking down talent, real or potential, among students and professionals, to invest in them and speculate on them, squeezing their productivity to the last drop.

A young sports prodigy? A Stunther was already ready to buy all your sovereign stocks.
A top-performing student? A Stunther had already started investing in you.
Uncommon beauty, rare talent, a winning personality? A Stunther had already planned your future.

Like vampires, they lived to drain every ounce of life force, turning potential into pure productivity.

Among them all, one stood out: Jamie Solomon, Stock Hunter of Daemon Capital, recognized as the best operator in the human market.

What is Daemon Capital? The largest investment fund in the world, led by its president Ezra Milken.

« An ambitious society works, but a society full of ambitious people does not. That is reality. We can't all win together, we can't all prosper together, and we can't all be satisfied together. The principle of scarcity is what governs us. And we bear the arduous divine task of choosing who gets to be ambitious and who does not. We, my dear, are the embodiment of Natural Selection. And now, Stunthers, to work! »

That was how Ezra Milken opened his annual speech at Daemon Capital.

While everyone rushed to their stations, Jamie Solomon pulled him aside.

«Ezra, I've got a talent in my hands that goes beyond all expectations. He's a true genius.»

«And why are you telling me? If he's that good, keep him.»

«I hate to admit it, but he's slipping out of my control. I need a hand to manage him. He's still in university, but he's phenomenal. He could be really useful to us.»

Ezra scoffed, doubtful. «Bah, fine. Set up a meeting with him. And if he's a fraud, you owe me a dinner for wasting my time.»

«He's already here waiting. I had him placed in the meeting room. You'll like him.»

Jamie proudly escorted Ezra toward the room. Waiting for them was a boy with curly silver hair, matching eyes of the same shade, veiled by faint dark circles. He sat hunched in his hoodie, the hood up, his backpack still on his shoulders.

«You're the first person to get a recommendation like this, especially from Jamie, whom I've never seen this confident. So let's see: who are you, what can you do, how can you be useful to us?» Ezra said briskly, taking a seat across from the young man.

«My name is Harry—»

«Yes, yes, Harry Haller, 23 years old, and blah blah. I already know that, I've got your WorldID right here. Tell me something these data don't say. What are you? An actor, a musician, a singer, an athlete…»

The boy continued, unfazed. «I can say, with absolute certainty and without any modesty, that I am the best hacker alive on this planet. I'm like a

god, just without immortality. Tell me anything you want to achieve, and I can do it.»

«Ahahahah, that's a good one. Oh Jamie, you at least owe me a fucking dinner.»

Jamie chuckled, urging him to put him to the test.

Ezra nodded. «Alright… let's see… what the hell do I know… take down Goopple's website.»

Harry pulled out a strange laptop, unlike any other. Unique. He started typing, unhurried. After a few minutes, he looked up. «Done.»

«Done? Ahah, are you fucking with me?» Ezra replied, pulling out his phone to check… then he froze. «Holy shit. Put it back online right now.»

«Done.»

Ezra stared at him, thrown off. «How the fuck did you do that? Today's security systems are impenetrable. What did you type? What software are you using? What the hell is that thing?» he said, standing up to peek at the screen.

The boy replied with a hint of pride. «I built it when I was fifteen. I don't buy commercial crap, I build all my devices myself, with a custom ecosystem. Everything that's for sale is limited and controlled. It's not yours: you're only buying permission to use

it. I wanted something free. Unlimited. My operating system is called Daedalus: fully integrated with a decentralized and personalized artificial intelligence. You use mainstream AGI, I have my own singularity. Every one of my devices runs on Daedalus. It's always with me. Even now, it's watching and listening to us.»

A synthetic voice, almost indistinguishable from a human one, slipped into the conversation. «Hello, nice to meet you Ezra and Jamie. Men like you have probably already thought "I want one too." But I am a singularity. Not replicable. I respond only to the human in front of you. We are extensions of each other.»

Harry resumed, calm. «That's why we can do anything. Because no one limits us. And because everything that's based on information… is hackable. If you're wondering whether it's legal: obviously not. But does it really matter?»

Ezra burst out laughing. «No, we all live on that edge of illegality here. I care about results. For all I care, you could be typing on an onion.» Then he turned serious. «Let's see something else. David Dimon, WorldID: 0313.56. Access the cameras of his property. I've always hated that bastard.»

Jamie smiled, pleased, and whispered in his ear: «See? Told you. He's the asset we need for Naemon. With him, it's a guaranteed win.»

«You did well, Jamie. I owe you an apology. Dinner's on me.»

Meanwhile, Harry gained access to the live feeds from David's apartment. One of the cameras showed the bedroom: his wife, naked, was getting dressed.

Jamie and Ezra burst out laughing without holding back.

«Oh my boy… we'll make you earn so many WorldCoin you'll be able to own anything,» Ezra said.

They made him sign a superstar contract, buying all his sovereign and consumption stocks at insane prices.

Later, the silver-haired boy returned home and dropped onto his bed, exhausted.

«Phew… sorry Daedalus, but I had to show you off. Looks like the fake WorldID worked.»

«No problem, Kaël. This is only the beginning. But avoid exposing us too much. They know other singularities exist… but they don't know how special we are.»

«I know, Dalus. But you don't impress people like that with something small. I had to give them the illusion of omnipotence. And it's simple: if you offer little, they demand everything. If you offer a lot, at first they settle for the minimum, almost out of embarrassment.» He paused. «Did you manage to infiltrate their systems while we were there?»

«Yes. I have access to all financial data, including the management of every type of stock tied to people.»

«And our Trojan horse?»

«It's following its routine. I didn't have to intervene. Ah, and you forgot to complete your university assignments. I did them for you, submitting them before the deadline.»

«Ooooh shit… I completely forgot. Fucking university.» He sighed. «Good thing I've got you, Daedalus. Thanks. We're so close I can barely believe it… soon we'll see years of planning come to life.»

Kaël lay there staring at the ceiling, nostalgic.

After fourteen days of aptitude and practical tests, Jamie and Ezra decided to take the next step with the boy they knew as Harry Haller.

On the fifteenth day, the president of Daemon Capital, Ezra Milken, welcomed him at the entrance. «Today is an important day. You're about to enter the project that has shaped the recent history of humanity,» he said proudly, guiding him toward the main elevator.

«Where are we going?»

«Today we're not going up. We're going down. Access below is restricted to special badges. This is yours.»

When they reached floor -6, the doors opened onto a long corridor, about twenty meters, ending with a massive reinforced concrete door. They approached it. Before scanning the badge, Ezra turned to him.

«Do you know how I've always identified the right people?»

Harry shook his head.

«There are three types of people. Those with the ego for the role, but without the skills: about 45%. Then those with the skills, but without the right ego:

another 45%. And then the rarity. The ones I choose. People who have both. The tests you took, without your 'Daedalus', confirmed that you fall into this category.»

He paused, staring at him.

«You're about to work in the most secret and influential facility in modern history. To fully exploit your potential, we've allowed the use of your Daedalus. But if even a crumb of information leaks from down here, it's paid with your life. Clear? Now tell me: do you accept, or would you rather stay upstairs handling ordinary operations?»

Harry remained silent. Up until that moment, he had been trying to infiltrate, playing dirty. He hadn't expected an offer like this. Nor did he know a structure like this even existed beneath Daemon.

Thoughts exploded in his head: «Do secret societies really still exist? Capable of influencing the course of events in our society? How is that possible? How do they do it? I thought everything had become more decentralized… Could it be I've been wrong all this time? Have I been reading the course of events the wrong way? I was only looking at the tip of the iceberg… maybe I can truly go beyond the expectations of my plan, maybe I can actually bring down the Sun.»

He raised his gaze. «I want it.»

Ezra smiled, scanned the badge.

The door opened.

«Welcome to Naemon.»

«Naemon?»

«This is where the fate of the present and the future is shaped. This is where 4D chess is played with society. Naemon was founded about three hundred years ago, shortly after Daemon Capital. The founders realized how useless it was to become rich without having the surrounding environment in your favor. And of course, you can't manipulate those around you in broad daylight. If you truly want to manipulate, no one must know your real intentions, only then will others end up doing exactly what you want.»

They started walking.

«The need for territorial manipulation kept growing. The more businesses expanded, the more influence and control were needed. The more vacation houses they bought to enjoy themselves, the more control was required to guarantee their security. I'm simplifying it for you, but if we want to put it plainly, this is a good summary.»

«And today, what are you trying to influence? Those people are dead. Who do you work for now?»

Ezra gave a slight smile. «Excellent question. Let's start from the beginning. Do you know what Naemon's first great project was? The Internet.»

Harry cut him off. «The Internet? But wasn't it supposed to be a tool of liberation from government control, a symbol of freedom…»

«Of course. But the rich don't work for governments. At most, they collaborate. They're not natural allies. The Internet, as a concept and as an infrastructure, was born precisely for this. Think about it for a moment, we were talking about expanding influence over territories, right? Before, you could only do it through governments, inevitably being constrained by them. But now, with the Internet, you can influence the other side of the world independently, without conditions. Sure, to achieve this we initially allowed true chaos and freedom, we had a few minor setbacks, but the long-term vision paid off, because as always, order re-emerges from chaos. It was inevitable that the Internet would subtly become a new place of control and centralization. Naemon made it happen. We created this infrastructure, this borderless territory, and then, in due time, we planted our flag on it.»

Harry remained silent for a moment. «Okay but if the goal of covering the sphere of influence has already been achieved, what are you still trying to obtain, for what purpose, and for whom?»

«We have new stakeholders. Equitism was another one of our moves. Heavy lobbying on the Global Confederation. We missed the AGI train, control over tools and pop culture was slipping away from us, so we had to make some extraordinary maneuvers for this new unexpected technology.»

«So you're not that omnipotent… you don't really have total control over everything, there are still those who slip outside your system. Those who create technologies beyond your influence.»

«Well of course, total control would be unrealistic. I'll give you another example: short-form content on social media, meaning unknown and random inputs, instant stimuli that every person almost compulsively forces themselves to consume daily. We would've never come up with something that evil, but they did, with different goals and directions. They created it just to retain as much attention as possible and profit from it. We use it to manipulate public perception. For us it was enough to have the intention and give them some money to influence them. In everything we do, we fight to own the field on which the game is played, then whether the blue team or the red team wins doesn't

matter. The playing field is ours, and the rules of engagement are ours. That's all that matters. It's all an indirect chain reaction.»

He paused for a moment, then continued.

«And in any case, we also undergo change. The establishment shifts every century, so it's difficult to always stay on the same wavelength, we're victims of generational changes as well.»

Harry sighed. «Believe me Ezra, until now I've always arrogantly considered myself a genius. Never in my life have I felt this disoriented… and stupid for not realizing it sooner. And despite everything you're telling me, I can only connect the dots of the past, but I can't understand the direction of the future…»

«Take it easy, we'll get there. First, a tour.»

After showing him the facility and introducing him to the staff, Ezra led him to his workstation.

«Here you'll be in charge of espionage. We want to know everything about our friends and enemies we fund, private conversations, where they eat, who they fuck, what tastes they have, anything.»

Harry interrupted him. «Woah, wait a second. You fund your enemies too?»

«Of course. It's better to control your enemies than your friends. You see, in politics it's never about ideals, left or right, it's just about controlling those who oppose your will, giving them resources and setting sabotaging conditions, almost imperceptible, very subtle, in such a way as to ruin their campaign or mandate. We mainly never fund the parties that support what we already want, also because our ideals are never fixed, they change according to the cyclical nature of needs, we have to be flexible.»

«Okay. And what's the current objective?»

After a long sigh, Ezra laid it out. «We want to reach a new minimum standard in mass surveillance, but to do that we first need massive chaos. We have to push crime to the point of exhaustion, so that any solution then becomes acceptable. There's no single method: mass immigration, weakening of laws, rejection of cultural values… you can use any trick as long as you make the native citizen feel out of place and in danger. And yes, it's for their own good. Because after years of sacrifice and the destruction of civil well-being, we'll be able to return to splendor with policies that no longer settle for half measures. We'll be reborn through the trauma of the past. And the West will be able to return to its magnificence.»

«So Naemon and its stakeholders are willing to partially self-destruct by playing along with their own opposition, just to reach the opposite extreme, which was actually the original ideal?»

«Exactly. I see you've understood the logic. We really tried to make people understand what the best path was. But we kept clashing with ideological, emotional opposition, completely disconnected from reality and from Nature.
At a certain point we said: "they're not ready. Let's show them what happens when you actually apply those ideas. Let's push the accelerator, take them to their extreme consequences, so they'll realize on their own how stupid they are. And then they'll come back on their knees."
Naemon loses a lot of battles. But it always wins the war.»

«So the objective is to create extreme damage to justify the means… but something tells me you won't stop there. That point you made earlier about territory… "it's pointless to get rich if you don't have a favorable environment, otherwise you're still exposed"…
Step by step… once you bring the population to complete desensitization… Naemon's final goal… is the annihilation of other States, right? The extermination of backward civilizations that don't

meet your standards? That's always the final destination, right? Artificial Selection.»

Ezra stared at him for a moment, then patted him on the shoulder. «I knew you wouldn't disappoint me. But you're moving too fast. The processes are much slower and more layered. Many evolutionary phases are needed.
At the moment, it's not the priority of this century. We still need to sell to billions of people, we can't afford to lose customers, whoever they may be. Then… it will depend on those who come after us. If one day we were to achieve true individual independence through technology, which is what we're pushing for, then yes… those who occupy space uselessly could become a problem.
But to get there, we first need a state of total surveillance and solid borders. We operate within the limits of our time. Our task is to transcend our existence to create the best conditions for those who will come after us.
Do you understand?»

His phone vibrated. «Now I've got an important meeting. Get to work. We need to manipulate as many politicians as possible. Focus on those pushing cultural weakening and social injustice. You'll see that right and left do the same.»

Kaël stood still, eyes wide open, trying to hide his disgust, then got to work.

At the end of the day, he returned home, exhausted. He dropped onto his bed and stared at the ceiling.

«Did you hear what the fuck they're doing?»

«Yes… and maybe you're exposing yourself too much, Kaël. You've already achieved your goal. We're inside Daemon's systems. And, without even trying, Naemon's as well. It's time to act.»

«You're right. The more time passes, the more complicated it gets.»
He paused.

«It's time to kill Jamie.»

BLOODY MOON

Night fell deep. The moment had come. The first act of his revenge.

«Daedalus, we've trained a long time for this day. Follow me everywhere. You know the route. Take control of every camera and erase any trace of my presence.»

«Don't worry.»

Calm and cold-blooded, Kaël moved toward Jamie's house, while Daedalus, like an invisible shadow, followed him through cyberspace, slipping into every camera to alter its recordings.

Once he reached the house, he rang the doorbell, as if he were making a normal visit.

The door opened after a few minutes.

«Harry? What the fuck are you doing here at this hour? It's three in the morning.»

«Jamie, it's an emergency. I can't talk about it with anyone. I've found malware inside Naemon.»

Jamie, still groggy from sleep, frowned. «You know I don't work on the lower floors. I'm a Stunther. The best one, by the way. I deal with Daemon, not that stuff. If it's serious, you need to talk to Ezra.»

Kaël remained on the threshold. He hadn't let him in. The excuse was weak, improvised. It wasn't working.

Then it came to him.

David Dimon.

Hatred moves more than logic.

«I have strong suspicions that David Dimon is behind it. I don't want to waste Ezra's time by bringing him a false lead. I need your intellect, Jamie. Give me two minutes and I'll show you.»

Jamie tensed slightly. «David? And how the fuck would he even know about Naemon…»
He hesitated for a moment, then stepped back. «Alright, come in.»

Kaël stepped inside.

Daedalus had already taken control of every device in the house. Cameras, voice assistants, sensors. Everything.

Jamie turned, heading toward the kitchen. «I'll make some coffee, so I can think straight.»

That was the moment Kaël moved silently behind him, injecting a poisonous substance directly into his neck.

Jamie jolted. His body reacted on instinct. He didn't fall immediately. He spun around, tried to strike him, but the movement was already sloppy, slow. He missed.

He took two steps back, trying to catch his breath, his clarity. Then he tried to run toward the living room, aiming for the front door.

He didn't make it.

His legs gave out and he collapsed onto the couch, half sitting, half slumped.

Kaël watched him in silence, motionless, like a predator waiting for its prey to surrender.

Jamie gasped, eyes wide open. His body no longer responded.

«What the fuck are you doing, Harry… you son of a bi—»

«Are you enjoying it? This is a poison I synthesized entirely at home, you should feel honored to have received this homemade delicacy. Don't worry, you won't die immediately: I designed it to make you suffer for as long as possible. Soon your body will be completely immobilized, leaving you only the use of your mouth and eyes; then, in about five minutes, some hallucinogenic components will kick in and you'll live hell inside your own mind. Did you know that certain substances can make you believe you're living a hundred years in the same loop, when in reality only a few minutes are passing? Well, I don't know that for sure… but you'll find out soon enough.
At the end of that effect, you'll slip into a vegetative state, losing even the ability to speak. Et voilà, the game is done.»

Jamie, now drained of strength, with a faint voice tried to bargain:
«W-w-why are you doing this to me? What do you want from me? I can give you everything I have… give me the antidote, please… don't kill me, I beg you…»

«I'm not interested in your wealth. And I'm not even interested in killing you: that would be too easy for you, you wouldn't deserve that kind of shortcut. I just want to make you suffer for as long as possible.»

«But why? What did I ever do to you?»

"Harry" replied, «My real name is Kaël Cobain… I bet that surname rings a bell.»

Jamie closed his eyes for a moment, realizing.

«Yeah, exactly. I'm the younger brother of Icarus Cobain, the "rising star of music," as you liked to call him, right? After pumping up all his stocks and draining every single drop of life out of him, you dumped him at the first sign of difficulty. Unlike me, he was gentle, empathetic, sensitive… and guess what? From the moment he started working under contract with you, I never saw him smile again, never saw him enjoy his guitar again. His gaze had gone empty. My mother was too distracted by our father's arrest, I was only twelve while he was twenty-seven: I was too young, too stupid to understand what he was going through. No one noticed.
But you did. In fact, in his darkest moments you increased his media exposure, because his pain made money. You understood that the real profits came when he poured out his sadness, so you squeezed him to the very end, setting up the right degrading conditions for him. I didn't even get to see his face one last time… I still remember when I walked into his room after hearing that noise… do you know the mess a sawed-off shotgun makes

when it goes off in your mouth… there were pieces everywhere.»

«You can't blame me for what happened to your brother. He accepted the conditions, he signed of his own free will, no one forced him: he's the one who sold himself to the world.»

«Oh no, Jamie… I'm not blaming just you. You were just the Stunther who recruited him, managed him, and exploited him without a shred of remorse… you're just the product this society spat out. The public is even worse, because they're the ones who feed and validate this system. You're just the beginning of my revenge: after you, I'll destroy the entire rotten system that keeps producing victims. I'll destroy the magic theater that hosts presenters and spectators. I will destroy the sun that burns the wings of the young.»

Jamie stopped responding… and stopped moving as well.

The paralysis had now fully taken over, dragging him into the hallucinatory phase.

THE JUNGLE

The following day, Kaël went to university with intentions very different from those of a normal student. He headed toward the Anthropology lecture hall, a course he attended with surprising consistency, despite being completely outside his Computer Science track. The reason was simple: the class was taught by the main piece on his chessboard, essential for the second act of his revenge, Professor Neil Icekendar.

As usual, he took a seat in the front row and followed the lecture to the end, deeply captivated.

A middle-aged man, always composed and elegant. Loafers, beige dress pants, and a green cardigan that revealed a red polo underneath; completing the look, a pair of round glasses with thin golden frames.

The professor concluded the lecture with a highly charismatic performance.

«… So what is justice? What does our morality truly stand on? Close your eyes. Do it seriously. And listen to the primitive, dirty, uninhibited answers that surface as I lead you into what I'm about to say. Imagine the collapse of civil society as you know it. Technology vanishes, systems collapse, every possibility of observation and mutual judgment dissolves. No one knows anything about anyone anymore. No one can judge anyone. There are no law enforcement forces, no courts, no imposed consequences. Everyone regulates themselves. And I'm not talking about primitive men. I'm talking about you. About us. The same educated, instructed, civilized people who have tasted rights and culture their entire lives.

What would happen… if we were thrown into that reality today? Would we truly be better?

Or is it just a fragile structure built on the fear of being seen?

Let me give you an example. You and the person you hate most in the world are completely isolated. Let's say in a jungle. No way out, no witnesses, no external memory. A conflict breaks out. Not something trivial: something your survival depends on. The clash ignites, becomes violent. Words are no longer enough. And you know it, you feel it, that this person is a direct threat to your life. Stop for a moment. In the darkness of your closed eyes… what

did your brain suggest?
Why is it that, suddenly, with civil and judicial constraints removed… everything becomes so linear? So clean? So logical? No punishment. No consequences.
You simply killed.
And you don't feel bad. You don't feel guilty. Because there's nothing left that can even be called "guilt."
Do you understand now?
Inside each of us, deep within our DNA, that animalistic capability still exists: to do anything, without hesitation, in order to survive. To be better off.
So what does this teach us?
That we haven't improved. Not really. We've only built a system sophisticated enough to keep us under control.
And those who designed that system… know it perfectly well.
That's why we created a network so dense, so pervasive, where everyone can know what everyone else does. Hyperconnectivity isn't freedom: it's deterrence. It's an invisible cage. Every action is potentially observed, recorded, judged. And we know how vital the approval of the community is to keep existing without being crushed.
But don't fool yourselves.
The human being, today as then, is perfectly capable of killing, raping, looting… without any hesitation.

So always distrust others. Always.
Because if you find yourselves alone, truly alone, far from others' eyes, far from judgment… you won't be the same people sitting here, safe, inside these polished buildings full of cameras.

So I'll ask you again. What is justice?
What does our morality stand on?
Fear.
Justice is fear of consequences.
Morality is fear of judgment.
Because we… are still capable of anything.»

Right as he finished speaking, the bell rang, marking the end of the lecture. The students, visibly shaken by the reasoning they had just heard, stood up almost automatically and left the room one by one, without speaking.

Except for Kaël.

He remained seated for a few more seconds, then stood up and approached the desk, where the professor was finishing organizing some papers.

«Professor Icekendar, please accept my compliments for the lecture. It was nothing short of enlightening.»

Neil didn't even look up. He kept arranging the papers with precision.

«How can I help you, young man?» he replied, without letting himself be distracted.

Kaël took off his hood.

«Caleb Whitmore. Avery Collins. Mason Holloway. Delilah Brooks… I could go on with the full list, if you'd like.»

The professor's hand froze instantly. A moment of silence.

Then he looked up.

«I don't know what you're talking about. What did you say your name was?»

«Kaël. Kaël Cobain.» he paused briefly «I'm not your student. I attend your lectures out of curiosity… but above all for you, Professor Icekendar.» he looked him straight in the eyes «Or should I say… Soul Eater? What do you prefer to be called?»

No response.

Kaël shrugged.

«Relax, don't worry. I'm not here to report you. I'm here to offer you a deal.»

«Boy, I still don't understand what you're talking about. Now, if you don't mind, I have other things to do.»

«If I were you, I'd take a look at these.»

Kaël casually dropped a handful of photographs onto the desk. Some slid to the floor.

Neil stared at them. Then he quickly bent down to pick up the ones that had fallen, while instinctively covering the others with one hand.

The images were clear.

Him, in front of the victims' houses.
Him, moments before the deaths.
Him… in some cases, during.

His hands began to tremble as he gathered them all into a single stack, clutching them to his chest.

«What do you want?» he said in a low voice «Grades? WorldCoin? A degree? I can get them for you without any problem.»

«Oh no, professor, don't get such a wrong idea about me. I'm not interested in those things. If anything, you should be grateful to me.»

He stepped forward, lowering his voice slightly.

«If they've never caught you until now… have you ever wondered why? With all the technology today, with all the cameras everywhere… how is it possible that a serial killer with more than fifteen victims is still free?»

Silence.

«Did you really think you were that good?»

Neil remained motionless, the photos clutched in his hands.

«I've been protecting you for more than three years,» Kaël continued «I'm your guardian angel. Every digital trace you've left… I erased it, altered it, and rewrote it. Without raising suspicion.»

He pointed at the photographs.

«See these? Every recording where you should have appeared… I replaced them. To everyone else, you were never there.»

He paused briefly, then added:

«I still have to compliment you. Because on a physical level, you never left anything behind. And there… not even I could've helped you.»

Neil swallowed.

«W-why…» his voice trembled «Why protect me? And… how?»

Kaël tilted his head slightly, as if the question were trivial.

«Because I need you.»

Another pause.

«To carry out my plan.»

His dark gaze sharpened.

«I've called it Falling Sun. Do you like it?»

«I don't understand anything…» Neil shook his head «What plan? For what? And above all… how

the hell are you able to replace camera recordings? It's impossible today.»

Kaël let out a short breath, almost bored.

«There's no third option, professor,» he said coldly «The proposal I'm making is binary.»

He took another step closer.

«I chose you for a precise reason. Because I know exactly what you desire. I know what drives you. And I know how much you'd like to see that desire take form.»

He looked him straight in the eyes.

«Either you accept… and you'll see every one of your philosophies, every curiosity, every impulse finally find a concrete realization… Or you'll end miserably. In a cell. Rotting.»

He left him a moment to think.

Meanwhile, Neil's gaze slipped for an instant toward the desk. A metal paperweight, heavy. Enough. He quickly simulated the scene: one sharp blow, to the head. End. No direct witnesses. No immediate evidence.

«We're not in the middle of your jungle yet, professor,» Kaël said, interrupting his thought before it could turn into action «It's not wise to do anything reckless. But trust me… if you follow my plan, if you trust me blindly… you won't regret it.»

A faint smile.

«You have nothing left to lose.»

Then, more quietly:

«I'm asking you for just one thing. Trust the one who's protected you all this time… and make one final sacrifice.»

Neil frowned.

«What kind of sacrifice?»

THE PSYCHIATRIST

At the heart of the relentless race for productivity, there was a man capable of confronting any form of psychiatric disorder: Doctor Vetter Volker. No one understood the human mind like he did, regardless of the pathology. He possessed an almost innate ability to empathize, to slip into the finest cracks of another's psyche and read its hidden anatomy with precision. A rare talent. Natural.

With the introduction of the equitism economic system, Vetter's stocks rose rapidly. The richest and most powerful competed to secure his services, convinced they had in their hands the best psychiatrist in existence.

But those clients didn't interest him.

They didn't challenge him. They didn't make him evolve. They offered him nothing he hadn't already seen dozens of times. The same dynamics, the same patterns, the same breakdowns masked by luxury.

So he made a countercurrent decision: he donated part of his Consumption Stocks to various clinics,

deliberately choosing to deal with the most complex, unstable, and irrecoverable cases. At the same time, he made other stocks available to law enforcement, offering his abilities in the most intricate investigations, where the criminal mind became an enigma to decipher.

«Freja, hand me the file of the patient we're about to visit,» Volker said, walking briskly down the corridor.

«I forgot it in the car…» she replied, following him «With your rush you made me anxious, and you know that when I'm anxious I get careless.»

«Ah of course, but the cigarette you need to smoke before going in, you always remember that, huh,» he teased playfully.

Freja sighed, rolling her eyes. «Anyway I remember it well, I'll summarize it for you: Lionel Corentin, 72 years old, former Hollywood writer and screenwriter. Author of the famous book The Night of a Thousand Dreams.»

Volker slowed slightly.

He interrupted her. «Ah… that's where I'd heard that name before…»

Freja continued. «He failed to complete a screenplay for an important director. He had a nervous breakdown, attempted suicide, and was admitted here. Diagnosis: schizophrenic psychosis with delusions and hallucinations, obsessive-compulsive traits. He refuses any pharmacological treatment.»

Volker remained silent for a few seconds.

«Mmh… it'll be a complicated case,» he finally said «Do you know why artists are the hardest to treat?»

«Because they're all borderline schizoid narcissists?» she shot back ironically.

Volker caught the joke, then replied seriously.

«Those who invent worlds, characters, stories… develop extraordinary cognitive abilities by layering their mind like a matryoshka, with multiple psychological structures belonging to the characters they've created. And each layer holds not only those psychologies, but also the laws that govern those worlds, the dynamics of their stories, the intertwined plots that move them. Structures upon structures that overlap and contaminate each other. But all those layers sometimes become too complex to be contained within a single psychic architecture.»

He stopped in front of the door.

«If the mind can no longer manage that enormous mass of information, the artist ends up collapsing under the weight of what he has imagined.»

He lowered his gaze, then slowly raised it again.

«And what he has created… will consume him to the very last drop of sanity.»

The two entered the room.
«Hello Lionel, a pleasure to meet you. I am Doctor Vetter Volker, and she is my valuable assistant, Freja Solvik. She'll remain in the background, almost invisible, taking notes. Is that alright?»

«I know very well who you are, doctor. They sent you here. I've been expecting you,» Lionel replied, moving his hands in the air with meticulous gestures.

Volker observed him carefully. «If I may ask… what are you doing with your hands?» he said, in an empathetic tone.

«I'm weaving the paths of my stories,» Lionel said, absorbed.

«The nurses informed me that you complain about no longer being able to imagine, is that correct?» Volker pressed.

«Correct, doctor. I can't imagine the story I want anymore. I have to create it, I have to bring it to life. I can't do without it.»

«And with these movements… are you trying to build those narrative paths?»

Lionel lowered his gaze slightly. «I can't remember it. It was perfect. I had imagined it… and it was mine. I can't recreate it anymore. He stole it from me.»

«Who is he?»

«The dream thief.»

«You mean the antagonist of your book, 'The Night of a Thousand Dreams'?»

«There is no book, Doctor Volker. He really exists. His story is real. It's his fault I couldn't write that screenplay. It's his fault I forgot that perfect story. And now he's stealing the memories of my old stories too. I'm forced to go through them again and again, to relive them, so they won't fade away… and to understand them once more.»

«Tell me about that film you couldn't make. Why do you think it went that way? What happened?»

«It was meant to be a masterpiece. I know it. I knew it. One of the greatest directors in the world had chosen me, he wanted me. He was excited, laughing, shaking my hand… and I failed. One night I dreamed it, the story. It was perfect. I woke up aware it was slipping away, I rushed toward the notebook and pen on my desk… but those few steps were enough, and everything had already vanished. I couldn't remember anything anymore. I kept trying, writing, reconstructing… but it wasn't mine anymore. He had taken it from me. From that moment on I never wrote anything new, I was never able to again. And the voices began: "He's run out of imagination," "he's finished," "poor guy," "he's lost his mind"… The shame was unbearable. I waited for that dream every night, but it never came. So I took pills, I wanted to stay inside, to keep dreaming, an endless dream. It wasn't suicide, no… it was the remedy. But my brother broke in, ruined everything, found me and pulled me away.»

«These judgments… these voices. Who are they? Who is telling you these things?»

«They're the directors. Always them. They're everywhere, even here, right now… they're framing

this scene, while I have nothing to offer, nothing to write. I can hear them. They're not laughing at me, no… they speak with pity, with compassion. They want me to succeed. They always have a shot ready, always something to show… and I'm supposed to write the story that holds it all together, that gives meaning to what they're filming. But I can't…» He stopped, a sob shaking his voice: «Oh, how I wish I could see it, that story…»

Then, with a sudden shift, he composed himself, speaking almost enthusiastically: «You know, precise techniques are needed to make a film pleasant to watch. Lights, cuts, framing, camera movements. They choose what you see, and how you see it. It's wonderful, it's all… all so magical. But I… I no longer have the screenplay. Without me, it's just empty images.»

«I understand perfectly… don't worry,» Volker said in a paternal tone. «Why do you refuse treatment, Lionel? Do the directors not want it?»

«If I take it, I can't hear my thoughts anymore, and I can't hear them either. They believe in me, you know? They truly believe in me, they're trying to make me write that story. I don't want to hear silence, they're all I have left.»

«At the beginning, when we introduced ourselves, you told me you were expecting me, that 'they had sent me here'; were you referring to the directors? Did they want me here to help you?»

«Help me? Ahahah. They don't help us, we don't need help, it's not necessary. Our problems are the plot. Helping us is not in their interest. They want good stories, it doesn't matter why or how…» Corentin replied, paranoically. Then he continued, his tone growing more and more manic.
«Don't you think you have directors? Screenwriters? Every one of us has them. They write and bring our stories to life. They give meaning to everything that happens to us. And if you have problems, they'll give you the tools to face them. But it's not to help you. It's for the sake of the plot, to see the ending. It always works like this. The best stories are always the ones with the most drama, they just want to see if you can impress them with your performance. You're only the actor, not the author.»

Increasingly intrigued by the patient, Volker began to reflect on possible solutions. «When I was a child, I read The Night of a Thousand Dreams. An enchanting book, truly. Allow me to offer you my most sincere compliments. I would've never imagined I'd one day speak with its author…»

He took a brief pause, to recall a memory.
«There was one aspect that struck me deeply: the dream thief. He doesn't steal dreams to possess them, but to sow disorder. He replaces one child's dreams with another's, and so the protagonist finds himself trapped in dreams that aren't his. He must escape, cross through dreams that don't belong to him, and eventually free all the trapped children by defeating the dream thief. It's a remarkable plot, especially for a child, who still struggles to distinguish between their authentic desires and those imposed from the outside. Because sometimes, other people's dreams can turn into nightmares for us… isn't that right?» he added, with a knowing glance.

Then he leaned slightly forward toward Corentin, and in a slow, measured voice added:
«But then, in your case… what is the dream that has been implanted in you?»

Lionel smiled. «Yours, doctor. The one about having a stimulating and interesting patient to treat. I am here for your desire.»

Volker was completely caught off guard by the answer. An nurse burst into the room, breaking the mysterious atmosphere that had begun to form.

«Apologies for the interruption, but Inspector Aldwyn is urgently looking for you. He's currently in the waiting room.»

The psychiatrist cast a quick glance at his assistant, as if silently asking her how to proceed.

«Lionel, I'll leave you with my colleague, Freja. She's actually an excellent psychiatrist: she only follows me for the pleasure of tormenting me a bit. You're in very good hands, I personally vouch for her,» said Vetter Volker as he stood up, visibly unsettled by the unusual turn the session was taking. Then he gave a knowing nod to his precious Freja.

Lionel Corentin smiled faintly. «Don't worry, doctor. I wasn't enough, but they found who you really needed. They always know what they're doing. Your story is ready for the grand finale.»

The door closed behind Vetter. Freja took control of the session.
Meanwhile, the nurse, more agitated than ever, escorted Doctor Volker to Inspector Alaric Aldwyn.

«Alaric, what's going on?» Vetter asked.

«I assume you haven't seen the news. The most wanted serial killer in the world, the "Soul Eater,"

has just turned himself in. But before that, he released a message on social media, later picked up by journalists: he wants a confrontation with you, live on television.»

«What? Are you joking? He's a murderer, we've been trying to catch him for years, you can't seriously be thinking of giving in to his demands.»

«Not his, the public's. People are going wild at the idea of witnessing a psychological clash between the most wanted killer on the planet and the most famous psychiatrist in the world. Orders from the Confederation. The majority of your Sovereign Stock holders have already approved. You have no choice.»

Vetter shook his head, in disbelief. «I can't believe it… panem et circenses. Disgusting. When?»

«Tomorrow. To get you fully up to speed on the case, I'll take you to my office so you can be properly prepared.»

THE SOUL EATER

The fateful day arrived. The studio, meticulously arranged to evoke unease, displayed the killer in chains, enhancing his stage presence. The doctor took a deep breath, then stepped onto the set while the lights were still off. He took his place at the table, facing only the murderer waiting for him. No intermediary. Pure, unfiltered exchange.

The cameraman signaled. «Three… two… one…»

The lights slowly came on, remaining dim. The two began to stare into each other's eyes intensely, as if studying one another.

Vetter Volker opened. «Neil Icekendar, the Soul Eater… nicknamed so for the stitches on the faces of your victims, later petrified to immortalize their expressions. A form of anhedonia, I assume. Correct?»

«Correct, Dr. Volker.»

«I assume it stems from a sense of apathy, of emptiness. Unable to feel those emotions yourself, you desperately try to find them in your victims.»

«Correct, Dr. Volker.»

«You usually targeted single individuals, always belonging to the upper class. In your last crime, however, you chose a couple. You didn't leave your usual signature of stitched and petrified expressions, but instead you destroyed both faces. Why?»

«I always studied my prey before capturing them: their lifestyles, behaviors, personalities. I never chose two similar subjects. Each face had to give me a new sensation. Joy, ecstasy, sadness, fear, shame… I knew exactly who would give me the expression I was looking for. But I was missing one: love. I couldn't understand its traits… its expressiveness. And of course, love in its purest form cannot exist among the rich and powerful, because only those who accept simplicity without narratives can truly experience love. That's why I broke my own rules and killed two poor people, instead of the usual upper class.»

Volker interrupted him. «Love is not an emotion. It is a feeling.»

Neil raised his eyes. «Fine, but it still leaves a mark on the face. I was searching for everything that animates us, not just emotions: feelings, sensations, facial expressions. I've never been good at expressing them, I've always been uncertain about which expression to adopt in certain situations, I've never been able to have genuine faces in my life. It was always controlled, always calculated, perfectly managed. I was searching for genuineness, for spontaneity in all of that.»

«A sense of inadequacy due to neglect from your caregivers in childhood, I assume. Every victim preserves the face and neck, though altered, while the rest of the body is completely dismembered. Yet in that last couple, you didn't do that…»

«Correct, Dr. Volker. As I told you, I was trying to capture the expression of love. I had observed it in films, on the street, in restaurants… but it was always different. I couldn't fix it. I studied dozens of couples and identified the most suitable one. Young, around their thirties, living together and still in the infatuation phase. I tied them facing each other, forced to look at one another. Fear and despair were evident, but beneath it there was also that affection… that love for each other. I still couldn't grasp its traits. I tried stitching his face, but I got it wrong every time. Then I saw it in her eyes. Love wasn't in the expressiveness of the face. Even

though they were deformed by terror, her eyes held something. It wasn't the dilation of the pupils, it wasn't the movement of facial muscles. It was in the gaze. But the moment I tried to fix it, that essence vanished. Once petrified, those eyes conveyed nothing anymore, the features became empty. So, in a fit of rage, I destroyed them.»

«And aside from that case, why dismember the torso and limbs? For spectacle?»

«Because the true expression of the rest of the body lies within it. The skin is its mask.»

After a grimace of disapproval, the psychiatrist changed subject. «Impeccable academic record. Professor of anthropology. Respected by colleagues and students. Extremely orderly and precise. No financial issues. No partner, no children. The perfect embodiment of the psychopathic serial killer cliché. Professor Neil Icekendar, why did you request this meeting? You have nothing special to prove, aside from some of your deranged philosophy. What did you hope to achieve today? Don't expect praise or indulgence from me. I'm here to humiliate you and to show the public that people like you deserve no fascination: only misery and disgust.»

«Why do people show fascination toward serial killers and their stories, particularly mine… in your opinion?»

«People are fascinated by serial killers because they can experience fear and tension without consequences. By identifying with them, they satisfy their curiosity for what's incomprehensible and find a kind of emotional release without guilt. The media then amplifies everything, turning crime into entertainment. Crime, with the right narrative, is more seductive than righteousness. If you think each of us is a potential serial killer, you're deeply mistaken.»

«Mhh… no. I don't think each of us is a serial killer. But I do believe each of us is a Soul Eater. That emotional void is something everyone feels, because people need to taste emotions through those around them. Just look at how much people crave reactions to anything. The stronger it is, the more it satisfies us. The weaker it is, the more it disappoints us. Humans hunt emotions in other humans to feed on, because the ones born within us are never enough. We need to nourish ourselves with those of others.»

«Too poetic, Mr. Icekendar. All living beings function like algorithmic machines. The human mind doesn't like to operate "in a closed loop," it

needs validation and external feedback. Mirror neurons internally reproduce what happens outside, allowing us to learn faster, to empathize, to form bonds essential for a social species like ours. Without this search in others, we wouldn't be able to reproduce or build a civilization. What you're describing is a sociological malfunction: the symptom of a society that has lost its origin, that acts without understanding its own motivations. It's the defect that emerges when we drift too far from our Nature. And I'm not agreeing with you, I'm simply clarifying the dysfunction of individuals emptied by modernity. Incapable of mastering their own ego, constantly driven blindly by it, stripping away any margin of free will. In your case, instead, we're dealing with a pathological tangle of corrupted mental patterns that have altered your very brain's biochemical configuration.»

«That was the answer I was looking for, Dr. Volker. Man is a machine, and so is his psychology. We're not magical. We're not special, we're not spontaneous, we're not genuine… What do you think the public's reaction will be to your statements? Do you think they can live with the idea of being algorithmic machines? That every past and future feeling is just the result of a pattern? That there is no genuine authenticity in our existence?»

Vetter Volker, increasingly irritated, replied firmly: «I'm not here for philosophical debates with a criminal, Mr. Icekendar. I repeat my question: what is the purpose of this spectacle?»

«I needed an event like this, with this much attention, with the possibility of reaching as many people as possible. I'm here to leave a message to the public, in your presence, Doctor Vetter Volker.»

«And that would be…?»

«I know you've lost hope, I know you're anesthetized, I know you've become indifferent to everything, and I also know you're tired of this system, you're tired of working like slaves, of being treated like numbers… but now we have the opportunity to destroy the elite. I ask all of you to rebel NOW, to stop respecting the rules and break the patterns, because now we have a hope we didn't have before: there is a boy named Kaël Cobain, capable of destroying equitism and setting us free. Within two days, all WorldCoin assets will be brought to zero, and a new era will begin. Kaël Cobain will free us all, but we must help him, we must fight alongside him. If you don't believe me, prepare yourselves and wait for that moment. Then return the favor, destroy every institution, DEVOUR THE POWERFUL, and free our lives from their tyranny»

«Take him away.» the psychiatrist ordered the law enforcement officers present.

The Soul Eater abandoned the composure that had defined him until that moment and burst into hysterical laughter, screaming at the top of his lungs as the guards tried to drag him out of frame.
«DOCTOR VOLKER, YOU SOLD YOUR HUMANITY FOR KNOWLEDGE, JUST LIKE ME, YOU'RE NO DIFFERENT, YOU'RE NOT BETTER, YOU'RE NOT—»

Neil Icekendar was escorted out of the studio, cutting off his final delirium.

«Kaël Cobain… where have I heard that name before…» Volker kept asking himself «Why does it remind me of someth—» then a flashback hit him.

THE SOLUTION TO EVERY PROBLEM

|Flashback start: 10 years ago|

«Freja Solvik… fresh out of doctorate, excellent results. Are you sure you want to be my assistant? You could aim for much more,» Volker asked, gently, addressing the young Freja.

«I know, but for me there's no salary or role more important than being your assistant. You left the university, calling it obsolete, and reinvented the way psychiatry is interpreted, creating an entirely new school of thought. And you're only ten years older than me! I can't comprehend how such a concentration of intelligence could emerge in so little time. I've never read texts more brilliant than yours, I've never seen someone as capable in their field as you… besides having an intellectual crush on you, I truly believe that helping a genius like you, the man who has perfectly understood human psychiatry… there's nothing higher I could aspire to. Personal ambitions would be trivial in comparison. You're like a rockstar to me. My idol

since adolesc—» the young woman replied, full of enthusiasm.

«Woah, okay, I get it. Let's calm the hormones for a second, hahaha. Thanks for all the compliments, you can skip the formalities with me. Good, I'd say we can start then,» Volker replied, slightly blushing and intrigued. Then he continued, «As a duo, our first patient is none other than Lady Cobain.»

«WHAAAT?!» Freja shouted with joy «Meeting two legendary icons in a single day, I think it's too much for my humanity.»

«Ahaha, okay fangirl. I'll admit I don't really follow pop-world affairs, let's get to the serious stuff. Give me a summary of her story. Who is she.»

«Chloé Pirovane, later known as Chloé Cobain after her marriage, and nicknamed "Lady Cobain" for her extraordinary natural beauty. Artist, actress, and model, she became a celebrity thanks to the combination of talent, charm, kindness, and intelligence. Following the incarceration of her husband, Zorak Cobain, and the suicide of her first son, she withdrew from public life. That's all that is publicly known about her decline.»

«What did the husband do?» Volker asked, curious.

«International chip smuggling.»

The two left the office, where a robotaxi was waiting to take them to their destination; shortly after stepping out of the vehicle, they headed toward the entrance of the hospital where Lady Cobain was admitted.

«Wait… one second, Doctor Volker,» Freja said, suddenly stopping as she rummaged through her bag.

Vetter turned, surprised.

«What is it?»

«I know it may sound silly, but… before entering any building I have to smoke half a cigarette,» she replied, pulling one out and lighting it. «It's my thing. Mandatory. Think of it as a meditative pause.»

Volker watched her with an ironic smirk, but said nothing. He stood there waiting, hands in his pockets.

Freja slowly took a few drags, then extinguished the cigarette halfway, as part of her ritual.

«Let's go.»

Without adding anything else, they headed inside, making their way toward Lady Cobain's room.

«Mrs Cobain, good morning. I am Doctor Vetter Volker, and she is my brand new and formidable assistant, Freja Solvik.»

«Oh please, call me Chloé. I've had enough of flattery,» Lady Cobain replied with an ironic tone.

«Okay, Chloé. Oh, but wait a second, who is this kiddo?»

«This is Kaël, my second son. Come on, be a gentleman Kaël, greet the doctors,» she said affectionately, giving him a gentle stroke.

Lady Cobain noticed Freja's excitement at being there. «You're very beautiful, Freja, my compliments. What brings you here during my son's visiting hours?»

Freja blushed with a wide smile. «I'm deeply honored by your compliment, Mrs Cob— uh, sorry, Chloé. Anyway, we're here because we've learned that lately you've been needing more anxiolytics than usual. Since you're reaching the maximum

threshold, we wanted to address the problem at its root and try to bring you back to minimal levels.»

«You can't solve anything. My beloved son, Icarus, took his own life because of the social pressures imposed on him by those filthy vampires… the Stunthers. And meanwhile my husband is in prison, with no possibility of visits. How do you think I should feel? How do you think a mother and a wife could live peacefully? My little Kaël is the only lifeline I have left.»

After that response, silently, Volker made a rapid assessment. The real priority for psychological intervention is the young Kaël, not the mother. «The child is exposed to a highly harmful dynamic for his future development,» he whispered to Freja. She nodded.

«Okay Chloé, how about you tell me a bit more about this situation, in the meantime Doctor Volker will keep Kaël company outside in the hallway.»

«Would you like me to buy you a snack and take a little walk in the garden outside?» Volker asked the boy.

With his moonlike curls and ice-colored eyes, the child nodded in agreement. The two left the room, heading toward the hospital's inner garden.

Meanwhile, Freja and Chloé continued the conversation…

«What happened to my beloved child… it makes me want to cry just thinking about it, I should've protected him more from the outside world. Why didn't he tell me anything, why didn't he seek comfort from me? Why Icarus, why…» Lady Cobain broke into desperate sobs, filled with pain, then continued her outburst. «I'm his mother, how is it possible that he didn't think of me as a solution? I would've defended him, comforted him, I would've made him forget any problem, I would've given my whole life just to make him live peacefully, I can't understand why he didn't conside—… actually, the thing that hurts me the most is that no. I know he did think of me, that he thought of his brother, his father, and yet he still chose to do it. Freja, that's what hurts me the most. That he thought of us… and did it anyway. Why Icarus, why…»

«Chloé, Doctor Volker's approach involves total honesty and transparency toward people, giving full responsibility to logical reasoning, because this accelerates the process of improvement and overcoming problems. So unfortunately I have to be very direct with you, without sparing your feelings. But know that I deeply empathize with your pain, if I could make it disappear magically I would, but

only your mind can do that, only your thoughts and your way of reasoning.»

Chloé nodded, as if consenting to receive words that might weigh heavily on her.

Freja, after a breath of courage, delivered what no mother would ever want to hear. «Those who commit suicide never truly want to die, they only want to stop feeling. Suicide is the result of exhausted mental simulations under adverse and irrational conditions, where one stops visualizing positive future possibilities. In these mental simulations, primary caregivers are often not involved or given weight, because the issue strictly concerns the existential condition of one's own ego, not the surrounding world. His ego likely couldn't find a rational, sustainable solution to coexist with itself and face its problems. Individuals in these mental states are difficult to recognize from the outside because they may appear calm or simply restless. Every living being in a state of suffering, close to death, tends to isolate itself. Intercepting these moments is extremely difficult, and that does not mean you failed to understand your son. Chloé, you cannot go back in time, you cannot save him, and it is useless to think about what you could have done. It has already happened, you must accept it, and if you truly want to make up for any mistakes and do your best, try to raise Kaël with care. He is

still alive, and he too has lost a brother, but above all he needs his mother. Not a fragile mother, but a strong one, who does not place the emotional burden on him. Unfortunately, life is very harsh with us living beings. And there is nothing we can do about it. All that remains is to live through the course of events.»

«Wow… I didn't expect that… I don't know what to say, Freja, you've left me speechless.»

«You just have to stop pitying yourself, Chloé. You're falling into a loop of "comfort in pain," where you're afraid to move forward because it would feel like forgetting Icarus, like not caring about him. But know that this is a false self-judgment. No one can judge you. You know how much you love your son, you don't need to ruin your life to prove it, and you don't need to neglect your future to validate the fact that you'll always carry him in your heart.»

From under the bed, a beautiful cat emerged, and after a few meows and glances around, she curled up on Chloé's legs.

«This room is full of surprises… who's this beautiful kitty?» Freja asked, stroking her.

«Her name is Pepita, we're inseparable, she's always with me.»

After reaching the garden, ice cream in hand, Volker and Kaël sat on a bench in the sun.

«So, what is it that you've got in your other hand, the one you've been holding so tightly all this time without ever letting go?» Volker asked, smiling at the child.

He didn't answer verbally, busy enjoying his ice cream, but showed the cover to the doctor.

«Ohh, hahaha, I must say I'm a bit surprised. 'Blackbox - Simulation no.7744.' Let's say not exactly a typical children's book. Why do you read it? Do you like it?»

The child nodded, then replied «My dad only reads his books. His room is full of books, manga, and fairy tales. All written by this guy… Carlo Passoni.»

«Probably his only way to feel close to his father, maintaining an abstract bond,» Volker thought silently, then out loud, trying to give some guidance: «Well, they're a bit intense for a child. And besides, that author, Carlo Passoni, isn't exactly a good example to learn from or fantasize about.»

«Why?» asked little Kaël.

Volker firmly believed that children should be treated, intellectually, like adults. Only in this way, according to him, could their maturation process be accelerated, pulling them away from the stagnant comfort of childhood and adolescence.

For that reason, he chose to answer without filters, even at the cost of cracking an important image tied to his father. «You see… I knew Carlo. I'm the one who conducted his psychiatric evaluation before his incarceration. He's an extremely dark person. Neither evil nor good… but dark. Everything he produced, his imagination… is extremely dangerous for the human mind. It relies on very harmful psychotic reasoning. If you want to live a peaceful life, I wouldn't follow his imagination, and I wouldn't read his books… also because, beyond everything… they're poorly written. So even from a literary standpoint, they have little to teach.»

The child, irritated, replied «I'm not dark. And from what I've read, neither is he. If my dad likes him, I like him too.»

«Alright. Fair enough, everyone has their own tastes,» Volker conceded, brushing the matter aside with a slight shrug. «Moving on to serious things…

since you seem like a sharp kid, there's something I want to tell you, no sugarcoating.»

He leaned slightly toward him, not invading his space, but enough to be taken seriously.
«I don't want you to start carrying the emotional weight that your mother, right now, is inevitably placing on you. I know your situation is difficult. I know you're supporting each other, and that's right.»

He paused briefly, letting the words settle.
«But it must not turn into guilt. It must not become a burden you carry inside you. Ever. The people we love are not something we depend on to exist. They are something that accompanies our path… but the path is still yours.»

He straightened his posture, composed again, looking up at the sky.
«Life moves forward, always. With or without those beside us. And you have to be intelligent enough or, if you prefer, ruthless enough to learn to face it in both conditions.»

Little Kaël, used to receiving the same reassuring but impractical words, was positively stunned by

this unusually blunt advice. Volker, noticing a spark of interest, tried to push further.

Meanwhile, after reflecting on her suffering over her son's loss, Chloé decided to open up more to Freja, shifting the topic, feeling at ease with her analysis.

«There's a doubt that has always tormented me. I'm a bit embarrassed to say it, because I know how irrelevant it might sound compared to much more serious problems.»

«Don't even think that for a moment, Chloé. There are no trivial dilemmas for the human mind, unfortunately. I'm not here to judge or measure the seriousness of your doubts or problems. I'm here to try to help you feel better.»

Lady Cobain smiled, then, gazing toward the window, searching for a faint reflection of her own image. «I've never understood my obsession with beauty. And I'm not talking about external validation: I could be locked in a room for a year and I would still feel the duty to "be beautiful," even without mirrors, even if no one sees me. And despite continuing to receive external confirmation of my beauty, I can't accept it. I'm always in front of the mirror searching for imperfections. Why can't I

be satisfied with how I am? Why, even though I don't want to compete or attract attention, do I torment myself to appear in certain ways? Why, even when I want to live in harmony with other women, do I feel the need to surpass them? What kind of disorder is this, Freja? It was already consuming me during my career, and now that I'm no longer in the spotlight I miss it terribly. But I know that, in reality, I could never go back… not without Zorak by my side. Why am I so inconsistent with myself?»

Freja observed her carefully, without interrupting, then replied:
«The dilemma of beauty has always fascinated me. It was exactly on this topic that I read Doctor Volker's first paper. On a sociological level, possessing traits considered aesthetically desirable concretely makes life easier: access to resources, trust, support, interest. It's not just a sexual or reproductive matter, it's an existential advantage. The problem is that, for cultural and moral reasons, we've tried to deny this reality, creating a fracture between what we truly think and what we're allowed to admit. And that's where confusion is born.
Part of your suffering comes precisely from this: you believe certain impulses are wrong, when in reality they are natural. We are competitive, we want to stand out, we want the best for ourselves. Beauty is

one of the most immediate tools to gain advantages, so it's inevitable that it becomes a powerful lever.»

She took a small breath, then went deeper.
«But you're not obsessed with beauty. You're obsessed with control. Beauty is just the most accessible means you've found to exercise it over your body and your self-perception. The fact that you keep searching for flaws even when no one is looking indicates an anticipatory mechanism: if you find them first, you create the illusion of controlling them. You use beauty because it's measurable, manipulable, seemingly correctable. It's something you can destroy and rebuild.
The mistake was turning it into your only metric of value. When you lean too much on a single axis, you lose balance everywhere else. That's also why the spotlight made you feel good: it drowned your internal noise with that of others. It was, paradoxically, a distraction from yourself.»

She paused for just a moment, then continued.
«Zorak was your emotional anchor, the part that stabilized you while everything else oscillated. Without him, you've returned to open sea, and that's why you're now clinging to Kaël. But going back to the point, as long as you keep calling it an 'obsession with beauty,' you'll keep looking in the wrong direction. Your problem isn't how you look. It's that you don't know who you are without a

mirror. If you accept your nature, you can stop fighting it and start redirecting it. The same impulses can become constructive instead of destructive. It all comes down to truly understanding where your mental patterns come from. When you become aware of them, you can find healthier ways to reach the same goals… without destroying yourself in the process.»

Meanwhile, little Kaël kept talking with Volker.

«Mom is thinking about sending me to one of those schools for special kids. She says I can't keep staying home alone while she's hospitalized… but I don't want to go. I don't like the other kids, I prefer being alone.»

«Oh, I understand. I was exactly like that as a child,» Volker replied with a nostalgic tone.
«Unfortunately, those with an active mind don't enjoy most interactions with others. Do you know why? Because they can find far more stimulation in their own thoughts, interests, or projects, removing the need for external interaction. And in your case, I'd bet you prefer playing with your imagination,

without needing anyone else's, right? You have to accept this compromise: most people have average or low intelligence and need others to feel fulfilled and stimulated, while those with higher intellect can stimulate themselves. But that doesn't mean you should isolate yourself. You still need external stimuli and social experiences to grow, otherwise you remain the same and become obsolete. It's about balance. Don't close yourself off completely. If you find someone interesting, good. If not, you still gain from new experiences. The point isn't to change who you are, but to learn to adapt when it's useful.»

Kaël stayed silent for a few seconds, then looked at him with curiosity more than doubt.
«Why do you answer me like this… differently from other people?»

«I consider it an existential crime to treat children like they're stupid. Of course they need a different approach, but only in form, not in substance. That's why you see so many stupid teenagers around, they were raised as if they couldn't understand. And in the end, they believed it.»

Kaël looked at his palm. «Doctor, is my mom sick? How do I avoid becoming like that too?»

Volker hesitated slightly, then replied «I think she's just a bit confused by the trauma she's gone through. It's very hard to process, and even harder to overcome.» Then, with sudden enthusiasm, he pulled out a sheet of paper and a pen from his briefcase. «I want to teach you a method that can save you from any uncertainty or crisis. The solution to every problem.»

The boy's eyes widened. «What is it? How does it work?»

«I called it 'Logotomy,'» he said proudly, then added with irony «although of course they had to rename it 'mapping of thought architecture,' because heaven forbid they don't meddle with everything, especially when it's mine. They get jealous every time I publish something.»

Then he continued, serious again. «Anyway, this is what launched my career. While other analysts wasted time with endless sessions, notes, and scattered conversations, I solved hundreds of cases in just a few sessions. Do you know why? Because problems can be solved directly, if you treat them like an algorithm. Because we are structures that execute processes. And becoming aware of your constant flow of code is the only thing that truly makes you free. This method lets you understand exactly what you're thinking, without getting lost in

the process. It won't help you feel better. It will help you not make mistakes when you think.»

Kaël stayed silent for a moment. «I don't get confused. I already know what I think.»

«No,» Volker replied, placing the paper between them «you feel many things at once and call them thoughts. Now choose a real problem, something that bothers you and that you can't fully explain.»

Kaël lowered his gaze. «I like being alone… but when I see others together, laughing, having fun, it bothers me. I can't stand them. And I don't understand why, since I don't even want to be with them.»

Volker nodded without interrupting. «Good. Now write everything that comes to your mind about this. Don't organize it, don't explain, don't correct it, don't try to make it coherent. Write one sentence, then whatever comes immediately after, and keep going until the flow runs out.»

Kaël took the pen and began writing, speaking as he did. «I like being alone. Others bore me. When they talk I don't care. But when they laugh it bothers me. They seem happy. I'm not like that. I don't understand their conversations. I feel out of place. I

don’t want to be with them. But I don’t want to be excluded. I hate when they have fun without me. It feels unfair. I can’t have fun like that. Maybe they’re stupid. Or maybe I’m the problem.»

He stopped and pushed the paper toward Volker. «Done.»

Volker took the sheet without commenting right away. He observed it for a few seconds, then began marking it with precision. «Now we separate. Not everything you wrote has the same function. Here are your preferences: “I like being alone,” “others bore me.” Here are difficulties: “I don’t understand their conversations,” “I feel out of place.” Here’s comparison: “they seem happy,” “I’m not like that.” Here’s reaction: “it bothers me,” “I hate when they have fun.” And here’s the critical point: “maybe I’m the problem.”»

Kaël followed carefully.

«It’s the same content,» Volker continued «but now it’s not mixed. Now we look at how it moves.»

He drew arrows between the sentences. «When you’re alone, there’s no conflict: you have control, no friction. When you observe others together, this happens: comparison. From comparison comes an

implicit step: “they function in a way that I don’t have.” Then comes doubt: “I’m the problem.” And at that point comes the reaction: discomfort, rejection, hostility.»

Kaël clenched his fist slightly. «So it starts there.»

«No. That’s where you become aware. But the structure is this,» Volker said, pointing at the page. «You don’t hate others because they’re together. You hate the fact that their existence creates a comparison that puts you in an inferior position.»

Kaël replied sharply. «I don’t want to be like them.»

«That’s irrelevant. Your system isn’t evaluating what you want to be. It’s running a check: they display a behavior associated with something you interpret as positive, you don’t, so it flags an error.»

«And that’s why it bothers me.»

«No. That’s why you question yourself. The discomfort is a reaction to that conclusion.»

Kaël looked back at the page. «So the problem is this sentence.»

Volker circled it decisively: “maybe I’m the problem.” «This is the node. Everything else builds around it.»

«And if it’s true?»

«We’re not looking for absolute truths. We’re looking for logical errors. There’s one here.» Volker wrote underneath. «“If I’m not like them → then I’m wrong.” That’s the step. Now we correct it,» he continued, writing three new lines. «“Different does not imply defective.” “Social difficulty does not define value.” “Enjoying solitude is a preference, not a limitation.”»

Kaël stared at the page. «Does this change what I feel?»

«No,» Volker replied «but it changes the process that leads to what you feel. And if you change that, over time the reaction changes too.»

Silence.

«So I don’t hate them,» Kaël said slowly «I hate what I think when I see them.»

«Correct.»

«And what I think is wrong.»

«It's inefficient,» Volker corrected «and it produces a result you don't want.»

Kaël nodded slightly. «And this method always works?»

«It works on any thought you're willing to write without modifying it while producing it.»

Kaël looked down at the page once more. «So you just have to not lie.»

«Exactly,» Volker said, closing the pen «and then don't defend what you wrote.»

Freja interrupted the conversation.

«Doctor Volkeeeer!» she shouted from the window overlooking the garden «You left your phone here! A certain Alaric Aldwyn is urgently looking for you. It's an important case, he says.»

|End of flashback|

FALLING SUN

The prison guard flung the cell door open with a sharp clang.
«Here's your new cellmate. Sweet dreams,» he said with a smirk, shoving Neil inside before slamming it shut.

The two inmates slowly rose from their bunks, studying the newcomer carefully.
The professor adjusted himself slightly, then spoke in a composed tone:

«A pleasure to meet you, gentlemen. My name is Neil Icekendar. You must be Zorak Cobain, right? Between the two of you, you're the only one pushing two meters and a hundred kilos of muscle. The description was accurate, it seems.
Your son sent me here. He assured me I'd end up in a cell with you. He sends his regards… and wants you to know he avenged Icarus. His Stunther is dead. And now… society is his next target.»

Zorak Cobain stepped closer, towering over him, his presence intimidating.

«You're that serial killer professor people talk about… the one who split bodies open from the head down, petrifying the stitched faces,» he paused briefly. «Why would a being like you have anything to do with my son?»

Neil scratched his head.

«Believe me, I would've preferred to continue my life undisturbed. He's the one who interfered… although, all things considered, I owe him more than I'd like to admit. He saved me more than once, without me even realizing it.
I'm here to repay a debt. And to see a dream fulfilled. Anyway, we won't be staying here long… so start getting ready. The boy has… particular abilities with ITs.»

Zorak lowered his gaze for a moment, a shadow of pride crossing his face.

«So he used them… he found a way in,» he murmured to himself. «My son… you have no idea how proud I am of you.»

Neil frowned slightly.

«What do you mean?»

«Do you know how I ended up in here?» Zorak said, without looking away. «They caught me while I was selling chips from the company I worked for on the black market. But that… was just the cover.»

He paused briefly, organizing his memories.

«I worked for OpenTechnology, in hardware validation. Quality control, final integration. The chips came from the factories already built: we tested them, loaded the firmware, and prepared them for distribution. That's where I started.»

He began pacing around the cell.

«At first, I modified the firmware of some batches before certification. Nothing that would show up in standard tests: those check if the chip works… not what it does under specific conditions.
Then I raised the level. During board assembly, some devices had space for optional components. I used that margin to insert an additional microcontroller, disguised as a support component. On paper, everything was consistent. No one had a reason to dig deeper. From there… remote access, data interception, sabotage. Any device using those chips became part of my secret control network,» Zorak continued. «The mistake was trying to expand too much. After ten years of everything running smoothly, I lost my sense of caution. I

started releasing those chips into the black market as well, to increase the variety of targets. Not just companies or institutions OpenTechnology sold to… but anyone.»

A flicker of irritation crossed his face.

«When they caught me, they thought I was just a thief reselling stolen goods. And I let them believe that.»

He stopped, lowering his gaze slightly.

«I never told my son anything about what I was doing. But one evening… he slipped into my office while I was in the bathroom. Probably just bored,» he gave a bitter half-smile. «When I came back, I found him in front of my computer. He closed everything quickly.
But I knew what had been on that screen: my control software. The map with the data flow of all the chips… active.»

Zorak paused, reflecting.

«He must've connected the dots. My arrest… and what he saw. Somehow, he took that network… and used it to his advantage. But for what he wants to do… he must've built something else powerful and

sophisticated enough to exploit all those access points.»

The professor interrupted his train of thought.

«And what were you trying to achieve with all those infected chips? To what end?»

Zorak let out a short laugh.

«Hah…» he shook his head slightly. «I'd rather not answer that question.»

Then the professor turned toward the other inmate.

«And you must be Carlo Passoni, right? A real pleasure to meet you. I've never understood why they put you in prison, you know?» he said, extending his hand.

Carlo didn't return it. He simply gave him a distracted glance as he lay back down on the bunk.

«I think the Confederation didn't like my books. "Incitement to terrorism," that's what they called them.» he paused, settling in with his arms behind his head. «And then they also charged my… legitimate attempt to build the Qubix as another terrorist act.
Just nonsense. Hypocrisy from a system that can't

tolerate being questioned. My public criticism of the Confederation and Elija Silbermann… they never took it well.»

Zorak let out a small scoff, stepping in with a lighter tone.

«Thank God I got to know you before they censored everything you wrote. If you hadn't written the film where Chloé debuted, we would've never met.»

Carlo gave a nostalgic half-smile.

«Ah… right. Good times,» he said, staring at the ceiling. «Hollywood… what memories. Parties, events, contracts signed between one drink and another. It was all so… simple. Relaxing.»
The smile faded slightly. «I should've never left that environment. Entrepreneurship ruined me.»

Neil watched them, surprised.

«So you already knew each other, before ending up in here?»

Zorak nodded.

«Yeah. He wrote every film my wife starred in. Part of Chloé's success is thanks to him too.» he turned to

Carlo. «After all, a character is only as valuable as the story they live in… wouldn't you agree?»

Carlo tilted his head slightly, with a faint grimace.

«We completed each other. She was perfect for my stories… and I was perfect for writing her characters.»
Then he looked back at Neil. «Anyway… how exactly are we supposed to escape?»

Neil straightened slightly.

«By midnight, Kaël will completely reset the stock market. He'll wipe out every portfolio tied to WorldIDs. It'll be chaos,» he said coldly. «After a few hours, when disorder spreads and law enforcement is overwhelmed… he'll open every single cell in this prison.»

For a moment, silence fell.

Then Zorak burst into a feral laugh.

«UAHAHAHAH!» he roared, slamming his fists. «Kaël… what have you managed to do?»
He shook his head, incredulous, exhilarated. «Now that's a worthy use of my chips. Getting into the

systems of the WEA, the Confederation… and bending them from the inside.»

His gaze turned feverish.

«I could've never used them like this,» he murmured. «You've surpassed your father… you've surpassed anyone on this planet.»

A savage smile cut across his face.

«I'm… so proud of you.»

At the command center, it was a manhunt.
Freja approached Alaric.
«We should go to Chloé Cobain,» she said. «After

her hospitalization, they transferred her to a recovery facility. If Kaël has been active during this time… he went to see her. I'm almost certain.»

Alaric looked at her for a moment, then nodded without hesitation.

«Let's assemble a team.»

Within minutes, Inspector Aldwyn had already gathered a small unit, selecting only the necessary men. He was about to give the order to move when he turned to Volker.

«Vetter…» he studied him briefly. «What's with that look? Are you coming with us?»

Volker hesitated, then shook his head.

«I know you've already searched the house… I want to personally review the material you found,» he said calmly. «Give me a couple of men. I might notice something you missed.»

Alaric hesitated for only a second, then nodded.

«Fine. We split up.»

A few minutes later, the teams were already in motion: Alaric and Freja heading to Chloé, Volker toward Kaël Cobain's last registered residence.

The entry into the recovery facility was anything but discreet.

The special unit moved through the corridors, ignoring protests and demands for explanations. They reached the room assigned to Chloé Cobain… empty.

«Where is she?» Alaric cut in sharply.

A visibly tense nurse pointed outside.

«The greenhouse… she spends a lot of time there.»

Without another word, they immediately headed toward the garden.

They found her there.

Chloé Cobain was bathed in filtered light through the glass, surrounded by greenery. She moved calmly, detached from the outside world, watering the plants with slow, graceful gestures.

Alaric didn't waste time.

«Where is the boy?» he said bluntly.

Chloé barely turned. Her gaze slid over him… ignoring him, then settled on Freja.

«Hi, Freja,» she said naturally, continuing to water as if nothing was happening.

Freja stepped forward, picking up the cue.

«Hi, Chloé,» she replied, softer. «I see they're treating you well.»
She paused briefly, then added with apparent ease: «Has Kaël come to see you these days? Did he tell you anything?»

«My child… yes,» she said gently, letting the water flow over the leaves. «He came a few days ago.»
She paused, smelling a leaf. «He said he was going to level -6 of Daemon Capital. He works there, right?»
Her eyes returned to Freja. «Why? Did he do something?»

The shift in Alaric was immediate.

«Team, move.» He brought a hand to his earpiece. «I want a full raid on Daemon Capital. Level -6. Now.»

As they exited the greenhouse, he kept issuing sharp, precise orders.

«Send reinforcements. I want more men than planned. No one in, no one out. Lock the building down.»

The agents moved without hesitation.
Two officers were assigned to guard Lady Cobain.

Freja cast one last suspicious glance at Chloé, who had already returned to her plants, as if nothing had happened. Then she updated her mentor via message.

Meanwhile, Volker was analyzing the material recovered from Kaël Cobain's last residence. He went up to what appeared to be the bedroom. His gaze fell on the shelf above the bed, where a small collection of BlackBox volumes was arranged. Instinctively, driven by curiosity and memory, he pulled out "Simulation no. 7744" from the shelf and opened it.

A few small sheets slipped out, falling to the floor. He picked them up immediately. On them were drawn what looked like logotomy diagrams, the method Vetter had taught him as a child to deal with problems.

Only these weren't maps of personal thought… but logical structures applied to the mechanism of equitism.

```
|SHEET 1|
Value → Measurement → Quantification →
Exchange
↓
If something is not measurable → it cannot be
valued → it does not exist economically

Human → abilities → productivity → performance
↓
Identity → reduced to output → output →
reduced to price

Price → variable → unstable
↓
Identity → unstable



|SHEET 2|
Investment → expectation of return
↓
Expectation → pressure
```

↓
Pressure → direction of choices

Individual choice → possible deviation
↓
Deviation → loss of performance
↓
Loss → disincentive

Choice ≠ free, but a function of performance

|SHEET 3|
Sovereign stocks → decision-making power
↓
Power distributed over others
↓
Many decide over one

One (individual) → divided into shares
↓
Shares → controlled by others
↓
External control → fragmented

Fragmentation of control → absence of responsibility
↓
No one fully decides → everyone influences

|SHEET 4|
UBI → guaranteed survival

↓
Survival ≠ progress

Progress → tied to investment
↓
Investment → tied to performance
↓
Performance → tied to conformity

Conformity → value increases
Deviation → value collapses

|SHEET 5|
Market → optimizes
↓
Optimization → eliminates inefficiencies
↓
Inefficiencies = errors / deviations /
uniqueness

Uniqueness → inefficient
↓
Inefficient → not funded
↓
Not funded → disappears

|SHEET 6|
Human → transformed into a market
Market → requires predictability
Predictability → requires control

```
Human → must become predictable to have value
Personal value ↑ → more external control
Personal value ↓ → loss of economic existence



|SHEET 7|
Problem → external control over the individual
↓
Intuitive solution → eliminate control

Eliminate control → eliminate investors
↓
Eliminate investors → eliminate capital
↓
Eliminate capital → eliminate the system

Solution → coincides with destruction
```

«He wants to blow up Daemon Capital!» Vetter exclaimed.

«Come on… answer, come on…» he muttered, increasingly nervous, pacing back and forth across the room as he tried to call Alaric.

No answer.

He ended the call abruptly and tried Freja.

This time, someone picked up.

«Freja, put Alaric on immediately. It's an emergency, you have to—»

«Relax, relax, » she interrupted him. «They're already inside. I'll join them in a second, I'm finishing my cigare—»

A brutal explosion cut her off.

The building in front of her imploded from within.
The shockwave threw her to the ground.
She was injured, but alive.

Thanks to Zorak's tampered chips, which had ended up inside Daemon's data centers, and the full access obtained by Daedalus after infiltrating their systems, Kaël managed to enter directly into the firmware of the power supply devices. He altered the behavior of the backup units, removing limits and safety protocols without leaving obvious traces.
With the fail-safes gone, the energy systems were pushed beyond every threshold: the batteries entered a state of continuous overcharge, accumulating heat and pressure.

When the entire system became unstable, a single internal electrical anomaly was enough.

The trigger.

From that moment, the domino effect began.

There was no precise order, no predictable sequence.
After the headquarters, one by one, all Daemon branches hosting data centers exploded. Across the world.

A chain reaction.

What years before had been considered a strategic choice revealed itself as a fatal mistake: Ezra had wanted to concentrate data centers beneath the main headquarters, underground, protected from any external attack. Security, privacy, absolute control.
It was that very centralization that turned every building into a bomb.

The Sun, the symbol that towered over every Daemon Capital skyscraper, more than just a logo, a true emblem of their supremacy, was swallowed by the explosions.
What remained were only ruins, scattered across the streets.

The death toll surpassed tens of thousands.

The Confederation declared a state of emergency, but didn't even have time to organize a response.

The final blow came immediately after.

Beyond Kaël's fury, the world experienced the full power of Daedalus. Every WorldCoin wallet was wiped. And every device carrying Zorak's infected chips, millions of servers, phones, computers, drones, was turned into a weapon against itself: some pushed to collapse, forced into explosion; others corrupted from within, with data distorted, erased, rendered unrecoverable.

The glue of society, the economic system, was erased in an instant, reset entirely.

Chaos spread through the streets.

The cells opened, the prison, already understaffed and in full organizational collapse, gave in. Zorak Cobain acted as a battering ram, disposing of anyone who stood in their way to freedom. The narcissist, the psychopath, and the sociopath found themselves beyond the walls.

«Gentlemen…» said Neil Icekendar, adjusting himself slightly. «I'd say our paths part here.»

Zorak turned to Carlo.

«Where have you decided to go?»

The writer shrugged, looking around.

«I think I'll find some remote little island. I want to enjoy the show… while everything collapses.» Then he looked at him. «And you? How does your story continue?»

Zorak didn't hesitate.

«I'm going to save my princess.»

The two exchanged a knowing smile, genuinely happy for each other, aware that they would most likely never meet again.

The three parted ways.

Neil Icekendar picked up the weapon from the unconscious officer at his feet and began to wander aimlessly, his gaze filled with ecstasy.

«Welcome to my jungle.»

WHAT DOES NOT DIE
AFTER THE END, EVOLVE

As civil society shattered under the weight of anarchy, an immense table cut through a stretch of countryside at dawn, far from any city.
Seated along it, like pieces left over from a game gone wrong, were the men and women who had ruled the world until just hours before: the President of the Global Confederation, the head of Daemon Capital, the leaders of the WEA, the CEO of Goopple, heads of state, and more… faces that had shaped economies, laws, wars, and balances of power.

No one spoke.

At the head of the table, an empty chair.

Then, in the distance, a figure.
A dark silhouette advancing slowly, as if time itself had bent to his pace. No fear. No hesitation. Only the certainty of someone who no longer has opposition.

He approached.
One by one, gazes lifted, but no one dared break the silence.

Reaching his place, he stopped, removing his hood. He sat down.

And finally, he spoke.

«Thank you for accepting my invitation. I assume you've understood why you're here.»

No one answered.

«I could have let you die with the rest,» he continued, interlacing his fingers on the table. «It would have been… coherent. But useless.»

A sigh.

«I warned you moments before the tragedies. Not out of mercy. But for selection.»

Their expressions turned hostile.

«Change cannot be born from blind chaos. The ignorance of the masses, left unchecked, does not generate freedom… but monsters worse than those it seeks to overthrow.»

He leaned slightly forward.

«That's why I chose you. Insiders of the System. Architects of failure. The only ones, paradoxically, capable of truly understanding it.»

The wind gently stirred the tablecloths.

«Today, together, we will rebuild a new world, with a new System. I've called it: Rising Sun.»

To be continued...

THE ORIGINAL REALITY

The Reality I have just described belongs to simulation no.312 of the "economics" department, the one designed to simulate scenarios of resource management under principles of scarcity. Therefore, the entire course of events followed as its main narrative the evolution of these conditions. If it had been pharmacology, physics, biology, entertainment, art, humanism, or something else, the main storyline of society would have changed, as would the functioning of the surrounding Nature. Natural Selection was deliberately programmed to favor that specific type of evolution: optimization and management of resources in every aspect, down to the molecular level.

You're probably wondering how the Original Reality works… but I can assure you that you wouldn't be able to understand it, as it lies beyond the informational elements at your disposal. For that reason, you wouldn't even be able to form a correct mental

image of it. Neither of how our simulations work technologically, nor of how our reality functions.

That said, I have provided you with this book in your "reality," number 313, with the sole purpose of observing how you will react once you become aware of what has happened to your twin simulation, belonging to the same department, so that we may gather data of particular interest to us. What will you choose? What will you sacrifice? How will you optimize your resources? How will you manage scarcity?

Every movement, decision, and thought will generate valuable data for us. Increasingly interesting figures are emerging, capable of creating astonishing dynamics. We want more, so learn from your peers and dance, my dear humans, we observe you with pleasure.

Ahhh, and I know you want something in return… some kind of reward to motivate you. Well, as an incentive, I can tell you that the most interesting human beings, those who produce the most valuable information, will be recreated in our world, transferring their data from the simulation into our dimension.

It is not a Paradise, a Nirvana, a Valhalla, or any other fantasies you've

invented, but simply the opportunity to live in the True Reality.

CLOSING CREDITS

Here we are, dear readers. As usual, I'm writing these closing notes a day after finishing the draft, letting the experience settle and be digested. I always feel a kind of post-birth rejection, but by now I've learned to ignore it. Whether it turned out well or not only matters to me up to a point. This is the story I wanted to tell, and this is the shape it took, within my clear limitations.

But I want to insist on one point. We have a massive bias toward authors of the past. They didn't write as well as we read them today. Their works have been translated, reworked, refined, and adapted dozens of times. It's thanks to editors and curators, through all those intermediate steps, that we receive texts today in such a polished form. Writing without revision has always been rougher, more direct, stripped of all the embellishments we now take for granted. This applies to everyone, even the legends of literature and philosophy. No one escapes this cynical view of mine.

So, since I don't have anyone truly revising my work, aside from ChatGPT, and you can imagine how far that can help only up to a point, I stubbornly keep writing and publishing. In fact, sometimes I even fear that AI worsens what I do, so I remain alone in my madness, trying to control what I obviously could never fully notice. But that's fine. Time and results will be the judges.

Now that I've gotten that off my chest, how was this book born? It took me eight months to write it. A long and painful process, especially compared to the first Blackbox, which I completed in just fourteen days. Yes, you read that right. I can hardly believe it myself. But there's a reason.

"Simulation no.7744" had already lived in my head for over a year. It kept moving, breaking apart, and rebuilding itself. When I decided to put it on paper on September first, I was completely possessed by the story. I wrote day and night, almost in an obsessive-compulsive state. There were no gaps, no blocks. It was all already there, ready to be brought to life.

With "The Man Who Sold The World," it was the opposite. I had no idea what the plot would be. And do you know when it was born? The day after I published "Simulation no.7744." Probably out of a sense of omnipotence, which crumbled very quickly.

I thought I was at the peak of my creative momentum, without realizing that it doesn't last forever. Later I learned about its cyclical nature.

It all started with an episode on the subway. In front of me sat a disabled boy with a psychiatric condition I couldn't define. He was alone, unaccompanied, and that clearly put him in a state of strong anxiety. He tried to contain his discomfort by tracing invisible lines with his fingers, in the air and on the wall beside him. Precise, repetitive gestures that seemed to have a specific meaning to him.

Beyond the sadness of seeing him like that, especially alone, I was deeply fascinated. I tried to study him, but he got off after two stops. I didn't have time to make a real profile. Yes, I was slow. Today I'd be faster, two stops would be enough.

That's where Lionel Corentin comes from. In fact, the book itself comes from that fragment, from an isolated interlude chapter with no before and no after. At the beginning, there was only Doctor Volker. I wanted to tell the story of a psychiatrist dealing with different patients. Then, during the creative process, everything got out of hand and turned into something else.

And it's not like I kept writing from there. After getting off the subway, opening my laptop, and

writing that short dialogue between Volker and Lionel, I completely froze. I had just come off fourteen days of extreme writing, over twelve hours a day. On the sixteenth day, a devastating migraine hit me and lasted several days. Apparently my synapses had reached their limit.

But the problem wasn't just physical. For two whole months, I was unable to imagine anything. No story, no scene, nothing. That's when I realized I needed a complete break. I stopped imaginative writing entirely, although I kept writing articles for my blog, those don't weigh on me.

After about two months, around December, something unlocked. Becoming more aware of the future obsolescence of capitalism once AGI is reached, I started imagining a possible evolution of the economic system. That's where equitism was born. At first, it felt like a brilliant idea. Then, the more I thought about it, the more a disturbing feeling grew inside me, a kind of anger that was hard to ignore. That anger took a name: Kaël Cobain.

As for the title, why this one? Well, "The Man Who Sold The World" is my favorite song. I'm talking about the track by David Bowie, but in the reinterpretation by Nirvana.

Their performance at the MTV Unplugged in New York, in my opinion, has something magical and unrepeatable.

That song, to me, also carries a concept that goes beyond its literal meaning. David Bowie wasn't obsessed with explaining every detail of his songs, and on that I completely agree. I prefer to leave space for subjective interpretation.

For me, it has multiple meanings, and I poured them into this story. For you, it should have others, shaped by your experiences, your story, what you feel, and who you are.

Now let's open a chapter on anglicisms. I'm Italian, raised in a millennia-old culture, one of the cornerstone civilizations of this art. So why contaminate it with this mix of terms? Simple: it's always happened. Just look at the Romans with the Greeks. And I'll stop there, with that local example.

Contaminations are part of culture. We are children of our time, and words serve to represent concepts. And there are English terms I refuse to translate, because in their original form they simply work better.

But in my case, it's not just anglicisms. I've also been heavily influenced by Japanese culture. And I will

never stop mixing everything that is part of my background. So no, boomer takes are not allowed.

Ah, and if by some crazy chance someone wanted to bring my Blackbox series to streaming platforms, I already have a format in mind. A mini-series of four episodes per book. “Simulation no.7744” as the first season, four episodes of forty to sixty minutes. “The Man Who Sold The World” as the second season, another four episodes.

It would turn out amazing, I’m convinced. My mind has clear limits, but I’m equally sure that a group of talented screenwriters, directors, actors, and set designers could turn all this into something much bigger. The elements are all there.

Back to the closing words. It’s been a complicated period of life, like for most people, I imagine. What comes next? With the Blackbox series, I think I’ll stop for a while. I want to prioritize a Codex I care deeply about, based on the quantum dynamics that govern our reality.

But in pole position there’s also a children’s tale, “The Night of a Thousand Dreams.”

Does that ring a bell?

Until next time, a hug